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COMMENTARY

SWF Seeks Tall SM -- Oversensitive, Sun-Addled L.A. Types Need Not Reply

By Marna Bunger

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If you were to identify founders of Internet community-building, Craig Newmark would be the granddaddy on the list. The 50-year-old programmer founded Craig's List in 1995. Today, he has to fight off venture capitalists who want to buy him out.

Newmark doesn't know me personally, but he's been in my life off and on for the last five years. He's brought me job prospects, sold my car, found me apartments and redistributed my furniture when I moved from New York to Los Angeles. Most important, he has gotten me dates.

My New Year's resolution was to have one date a week. As with all my resolutions, I lost momentum in February. I immediately turned to the L.A. division of *craigslist.org* and placed a personal ad under "women for men":

You Deplete Me -- 38

Date: 2004-02-19, 8:54AM PST

Am I the only woman who wanted to throttle Tom Cruise when he uttered those three words, "You complete me." I'm complete. I'm looking for someone to complement me.

Is there a man in L.A. in his 30s who knows what he wants to be when he grows up? He might also know a few 3- or 4-syllable words and know the difference between Celia Cruz and Tom Cruise.

My only physical requirement is this mystery man must be taller than 5'10". No disrespect to the vertically challenged, but I don't like guys talking to my nipples. I'm 38, an Aquarian, in the creative field, East Coast transplant and have a master's degree. I'm also 5'9" (maybe 5'11" if I Jersey-fy my hair), blue, auburn, white. Love the outdoors, yoga, and periodic visits to the gym. Be decent, normal and well-adjusted. I am; surely someone else in this town is too.

I thought this was an OK ad. It was a little sarcastic but funny.

I was hoping someone of intelligence would see the beauty in the ad and respond. What I forgot was, where there are free personal ads, there will always be critics and people with too much time on their hands — at least in L.A.

Responses poured in. I soon realized there must be a lot of angry, short guys in L.A. I was amazed to receive so many negative responses to a personal ad, and even more amazed that people spent time to respond negatively. "Love to see how you'd react to a 5-foot Asian doctor married to a black woman, and the best heart surgeon in the country ready to operate on you to save your life! Would you LOOK down your nose at him and say, 'Oh, you're too short to operate on me!' Get the point pinhead?" wrote one respondent.

That's when I snapped.

Somehow my preference for tall men had been translated into racism. Other than replying, which would be a waste of time, there was only one thing I could do.

I placed the same ad on the New York Craig's List. Within minutes, I got responses, positive responses. It reinforced my belief that what happened on the L.A. site was just a symptom of the L.A. environment. My New York would-be paramours told me I was funny and refreshing. They got me. Sun-soaked and self-absorbed, the Angelenos were caught up in the pursuit of nonexistent perfection. The New Yorkers were more based in reality.

After a few days, the L.A. e-mail frenzy died down. I decided to survey my gaggle of 30-something girlfriends. At least half a dozen women I know in L.A. have had similar experiences with the personal ads they placed.

One friend did what I did, placing ads in L.A. and San Francisco. She too received nice, normal responses from San Francisco and a handful of negative replies from L.A. people.

I've quit the personals habit. The ads are interesting to read, but after my last experience, they yielded more grief than viable dates. Perhaps Newmark can develop free, online counseling for the L.A. community.

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